$1.00

livingCity

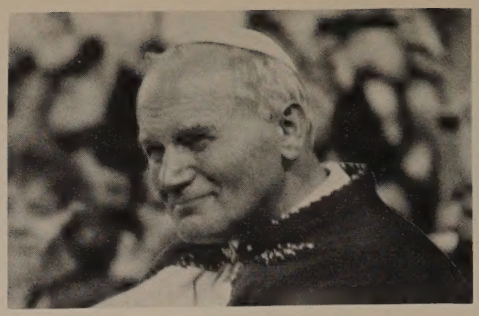
3 1981
VOLUME 20
MARCH

LIBRARY
MAR 23 1981

"To do the will of God is to do what is most inherent to our nature, what most satisfies our deepest aspirations. . . ."
OUR "YES" TO GOD An interview with Chiara Lubich page 6

3 1981 VOLUME 20 MARCH

livingCity



2 *JUSTICE IS NOT ENOUGH: On Sunday, November 30, 1980 Pope John Paul II announced his second encyclical, "Dives in misericordia," ("Rich in mercy"). At the Angelus that day, he had said that the main purpose of the encyclical is ". . . to recall the Father's love, revealed in the whole Messianic mission of Christ."*

5 *OUR "YES" TO GOD: An eleven page feature article dedicated to one of the points of the spirituality of the Focolare Movement.*

Sharry Silvi Editor
Nancy O'Donnell Managing Editor
Lucy Comolli Art Director
Doris Revere Peters Contributing Editor
Marilyn Boesch James and Kathy Webber Article Editors
Vera Giannini Senior Copy Editor
Richard Tetreau Carolyn Johnson Copy Editors
Longina Briones Assistant Art Director
Mary Young Circulation Manager
Rolf F. Rehe Art Consultant

$1.00
livingCity
3 1981 VOLUME 20 MARCH
"To do the will of God is to do what is most inherent to our nature, what most satisfies our deepest aspirations. . . ."
OUR "YES" TO GOD An interview with Chiara Lubich page 6

Two Gen 4 at a recent gathering. Playing or singing can also be ways of expressing our "yes" to God.

(Photo by Kim Rowley)

Living City is published 11 times a year (10 monthly and a bimonthly issue in August-September) by the Focolare Movement, a non-profit corporation, P.O. Box 496, New York, NY 10021.
Subscription prices for one year: USA and possessions: US$10.00; Canada: US$12.00; Elsewhere: US$18.00; Air Mail (all countries): US$25.00.
An envelope is enclosed in each magazine for subscriptions or renewals. Use this address for subscription orders and inquires: LIVING CITY, P.O. Box 126, Jamaica, NY 11415.
© 1981 by the Focolare Movement, Inc. All rights reserved.

OTHER EDITIONS OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT MAGAZINE

CHINESE: "San Sing Seung Yuet Hong" - 70 Waterloo Road 11 B/F - Kowloon - Hong Kong

DUTCH: "Nieuwe Stad" - St. Stephanusstraat 11 - Nijmegen - Holland

TO BE THE "YOU" OF GOD: An interview with Chiara Lubich on the will of God. "To do the will of God is to entraft ourselves onto the very path which leads to our fulfillment."

9 *WHEN LIFE BECOMES A DIVINE ADVENTURE: A series of short experiences by people from different walks of life who have tried to apply themselves to doing the will of God in various situations.*

Italian Cultural Institute

19 *PREACHING WITH A BRUSH: Fra Angelico went to Florence at a very young age to become an apprentice painter. However, after seven years, he understood that God was calling him and thus began another apprenticeship this time with God as his Master.*

ONTENTS

Piero Rogliardi	JUSTICE IS NOT ENOUGH	2
Compiled by Guglielmo Boselli and Rosanna Cantelmi	OUR "YES" TO GOD	5
Chiara Lubich	TO BE THE "YOU" OF GOD	6
	WHEN LIFE BECOMES A DIVINE ADVENTURE An Expression of God's Love A Couple and a New Beginning A Factory Worker Accepting Suffering	9
Chiara Lubich	THE WORD OF LIFE	16
	EXPERIENCES	17
Richard Rosselli	Profiles: PREACHING WITH A BRUSH! Fra Angelico and the 15th century	19
Marcella Ferrari	AN UNEXPECTED PROMOTION	26

OTHER DEPARTMENTS:

FAMILY LIFE	24
IMAGES FOR WORDS	25
THE YOUNG AND THE GOSPEL	28

NCH:
Nouvelle Cité" - 131, rue Castagnary F75 015 - France
Nouvelle Cité" - C.P. 636 - St. Jerome - P. Q. - da - J7Z 5T9

MAN: "Neue Stadt" - Gleissnerstrasse 87 - Munchen 83 - Germany

ITALIAN: "Città Nuova" - Via degli Scipioni 265 - 00192 Rome - Italy

PORTUGUESE: "Cidade Nova" - Rua Pio XII 274 - Paraiso, Sao Paulo - Brazil

SPANISH:
1. "Ciudad Nueva" - Av. da Rivadavia 4939 - Buenos Aires 24 - Argentina
2. "Ciudad Nueva" - Ferrer del Rio - 1 esc A, 2º 5ª Madrid - Spain

OTHER ENGLISH EDITIONS:
1. "New City" - 57 Twyford Avenue - London W3 - England
2. "New City" - P. O. Box 332 - Manila, Philippines
3. "New City" - 367 Balwyn Rd. - Balwyn North 3104 - Australia

JUSTICE IS NOT ENOUGH

by PIERO ROGLIARDI

Pope John Paul II proposes the evangelical virtue of mercy as the daring way to build a future for humanity that is more human.

On November 30, 1980, Pope John Paul II issued his latest encyclical. He wanted to issue it on this date because it coincided with the first Sunday of Advent, ". . . on which," he explained, "the procession begins of human hearts towards Christ."

It has been said that the Holy Father wrote some parts of the encyclical kneeling in front of the altar. One thing is certain: his desire in writing was to draw many to Christ " . . . who reveals the mystery of the Father and His love." These words are taken from "Gaudium et Spes," the document of the Second Vatican Council which deals with the Church in the modern world. Also this recent encyclical was written in the context of the developments after the Council and is meant to be a way to implement its doctrine.

"While the various currents of human thought both in the past and at the present have tended and still tend to separate theocentrism and anthropocentrism, and even to set them in opposition to each other, the Church, following Christ, seeks to link them up in human history, in a deep and organic way."

It would not be surprising that the title "Dives in misericordia" ("Rich in mercy" taken from the first words of the text, as is usually done) and the very topic of the encyclical, mercy as an attribute of God, and a virtue of the human being, who receives and shares it, and finally, the biblical research which supports it, may not be popular with some in our contemporary world. The pope knows that modern society's way of thinking tends to eliminate any idea of mercy. In fact, the very word seems to make many uneasy.

Apparently, in fact, many were expecting the pope to say something along the lines of his first encyclical "Redemptor hominis," which came out in March, 1979 and was focused on the human being. However, reading carefully this recent document, it is difficult to understand how the two encyclicals can be seen in opposition to one another.

In fact, a "looking within" which is what is asked for this time, tells us clearly that the human being is still at the center. God and humanity are always so intrinsically related to one another.

The reference that the pope makes to "Gaudium et Spes" is significant. He says: "Christ, the new Adam . . . fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his lofty calling," and does it, " . . . in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love."

As a confirmation we have the parable of the prodigal son of which the pope makes an acute exegesis expressing new insights. Here the human being is elevated.

"In the parable of the prodigal son, the term 'justice' is not used even once; . . . Nevertheless, the relationship between justice and love, that is manifested as mercy, is inscribed with great exactness in the content of the Gospel parable. It becomes more evident that love is transformed into mercy when it is necessary to go beyond the precise norm of justice — precise and often too narrow."

"What took place in the relationship between the father and the son in Christ's parable is not to be evaluated 'from the outside!. Our prejudices about mercy are mostly the result of appraising them only from the outside. At times it happens that by following this method of evaluation we see in mercy above all a relationship of inequality between the one offering it and the one receiving it. And, in consequence, we are quick to deduce that mercy belittles the receiver, that it offends the dignity of man. The parable of the prodigal son shows that the reality is different: the relationship of mercy is based on the common experience of that good which is man, on the common experience of the dignity that is proper to him. This common experience makes the prodigal son begin to see himself and his actions in their full truth (this vision in truth is a genuine form of humility); . . . ."

United Nations/Photo by M. Jiminez

One does not know if it is because of the mercy of God, or because of the truth about man. Certainly, however it is through the "reciprocity" which is a basic element in the relationship between God and man. In fact, the son, who has betrayed his father, squandering his possessions, once he has accepted the truth about himself, comes back. He does not feel humiliated, but "restored to value," thanks to the love of his father, who knows that, (even if everything else was gone), one basic value has been saved: his son's humanity. This is the true meaning of mercy: that " . . . does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical or material evil: mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes, draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man."

"The present-day mentality, more perhaps than that of people in the past, seems opposed to a God of mercy, and in fact tends to exclude from life and to remove from the human heart the very idea of mercy. . . ."

Today's mentality, diffident as it is to anything that might look like interference, cannot help but accept this "interior kind of love . . . called agape," because it is something attractive, more powerful and deeper than divine justice, which is also an expression of God's transcendent perfection.

"Especially through his life-style and through his actions, Jesus revealed that love is present in the world in which we live — an effective love, a love that addresses itself to man and embraces everything that makes up his humanity.

"Christ, then, reveals God who is Father, who is 'love.' . . . Making the Father present as love and mercy is, in Christ's own consciousness, the fundamental touchstone of his mission as the Messiah. . . .

"On the basis of this way of manifesting the presence of God who is Father, love and mercy, Jesus makes mercy one of the principal themes of his preaching."

Justice is done, but the victim is his own son, Jesus Christ. He who was without sin, "is treated by God as a sinner for our benefit," and this is the absolute proof of God's love for us.

But also it is a matter of counteracting evil with good, love. "The Cross is the profound condescension of God to man and to what man — especially in difficult and painful moments — looks on as his unhappy destiny." Therefore, "believing in the crucified son, . . . means believing that love is present in the world and that this love is more powerful than any kind of evil."

"Christ crucified is for us the loftiest model, inspiration and encouragement. When we base our-

selves on this disquieting model, we are able with all humility to show mercy to others, knowing that Christ accepts it as if it were shown to himself. . . . An act of merciful love is only really such when we are deeply convinced at the moment that we perform it that we are at the same time receiving mercy from the people who are accepting it from us. If this bilateral and reciprocal quality is absent, our actions are not yet true acts of mercy."

Some, comparing this encyclical with "Gaudium et Spes," insist that we have a more pessimistic outlook on the world. In reality, the pope believes in a better future and he intuits which are the premises existing in humanity to reach it. He cannot, however, close his eyes to the distressing situation that the world today presents.

"Society can become ever more human only if we introduce into the many-sided setting of interpersonal and social relationships, not merely justice, but also that 'merciful love' which constitutes the messianic message of the Gospel."

His analysis of the evils afflicting humanity, is enriched this time by always more appropriate considerations. "We are concerned about " . . . the possibility of a 'peaceful' subjugation of individuals, of environments, of entire societies and of nations. . . ." And we find " . . . a defective machinery at the root of contemporary economics and materialistic civilization." All this is happening, "against the background of the gigantic remorse . . ." for the obvious inequality, torture and abuse of human rights.

Let us make room for love, with all its characteristics that St. Paul lists in his letter to the Corinthians. In this picture we see some of the victims of the November earthquake in Italy.

We can ask ourselves the question, "Is justice enough?" Certainly not, unless there is room for the "deeper force that is love" to mold human life in all its dimensions.

At this point, the Church is brought into the picture. It is her task as a disciple of Christ, to give witness to mercy, " . . . professing it in the first place as a salvific truth . . ." and attempting " . . . to introduce it and to make it incarnate in the lives both of her faithful and . . . in the lives of all people of good will."

But "the truth, revealed in Christ, about God the 'Father of mercies' enables us to 'see' him as particularly close to man, especially when man is suffering, when he is under threat at the very heart of his existence and dignity. And this is why, in the situation of the Church and the world today, many individuals and groups guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say almost spontaneously, to the mercy of God. . . . For the mystery of God the 'Father of mercies' revealed by Christ becomes, in the context of today's threats to man, as it were a unique appeal addressed to the Church."

The human being who according to "Redemptor Hominis" is the "way" of the Church, has a great need for mercy. Today, more than ever he is surrounded by personal and social sin. But it is just "sin that calls for mercy." Christ

founded the Church so that it might proclaim and live mercy, revealing as he himself did, the mystery of the Father and his love.

We need not fear that we are taking something away from justice. Mercy " . . . is the most perfect incarnation of 'equality' between people and therefore the most perfect incarnation of justice as well."

"A world from which forgiveness was eliminated would be nothing but a world of cold and unfeeling justice, in the name of which each person would claim his or her own rights vis-a-vis others; the various kinds of selfishness latent in man would transform life and human society into a system of oppression of the weak by the strong, or into an area of permanent strife between one group and another."

Rather, let us make room for love, with all its characteristics that St. Paul lists in his letter to the Corinthians — characteristics that are even "maternal" as the pope has said. No evil can prevail when faced with a love that has these characteristics.

As a result, a precise guideline is found, an attitude, a new way of "being." "In every sphere of interpersonal relationships justice must, so to speak, be 'corrected' . . . by love." What is at stake here is the very authenticity of the Church and of all who call themselves Christians.

A monk from Mount Athos used to say: "Through your mercy, you will be God for your brothers and sisters."

The message contained in the encyclical, written to satisfy a profound need, is very timely. It comes to fill an emptiness, as we read in the Psalms, "Abyss calls for abyss." The chasm that the world is slipping into cries out for merciful love. The pope, surprising everyone, responded immediately to the call. ●

OUR "YES" TO GOD

Compiled by
GUGLIELMO BOSELLI and
ROSANNA CANTELMI

We live in an era when many are tempted to rid themselves of the idea of God. They live in the illusion of achieving personal and social fulfillment, ignoring the existence of everything that is transcendental, and setting themselves as a measure by which people and events can be evaluated.

The frightful consequences of this are right before our eyes: a society that believes in nothing and aims at nothing; a world marked by loneliness, despair, escapes from reality, moral degradation, skepticism and joyless hedonism . . . the need for a spiritual dimension to refer to in the choices to be made, and giving meaning, unity and harmony to everyday's actions, relationships, and life in society in general, is immense.

It is in this framework that we want to speak of a choice which may seem to be going against the "current" when we see what is happening around us. We could call it our "yes" to God, that is the will of God as a reference point, as the guideline for our lives which inserts us into the plan that God, in his wisdom, has for each one of us. This "yes" is the solution that Christianity offers to the value crisis of our times.

We invite our readers not only to reflect about it, but to act upon it and thus experience the validity of such an answer when it is applied to our daily lives, at home or at work, in every area of endeavor and in each moment.

This topic, the will of God, will appear often in the coming issues. We start now with an interview with Chiara Lubich on the subject, followed by experiences of people who, in various circumstances and even in very difficult situations, have found that their "yes" to God, their efforts to do his will, proved to be the road towards a new way of life in today's world.

to be the "you" of god

An interview with CHIARA LUBICH

Question: Every year in the Focolare Movement a point of the spirituality is chosen in order to deepen our understanding of it. This year it will be "our yes to God," that is, "the will of God in our lives." This will be the topic for all gatherings, for the Mariapolises, for the daily life of each person. What place does this topic have in the whole spirituality of the Movement?

Answer: To say "yes" to God, to do his will, is of basic importance for the members of the Movement. In fact, those who become part of this work of God within the Church, start by making a choice. It is a choice of God as the ideal of their life, giving him the first place, wanting to love him wholeheartedly.

But how can we express this love and make it concrete? We cannot love God just through sentiments, or only through many prayers. Jesus said that we love God by doing what he wants from us. Love, in fact, always leads us in every situation to do what the loved one wants from us. Even children know that in order to express their love for their mother, they have to do what she says.

❄

Question: What exactly do you mean in the Movement when you speak of "doing the will of God?"

Answer: Human beings have been created in the image of God. This means that we stand "before" God. We have been created in such a way as to be able to be in communion with God.

It is in the very nature of the human being to be the "you" of God. We cannot understand man unless we put him in this perspective.

But if this is so, if this is our true being, this is also so for what concerns our existing, living. If we have been created like this, we cannot fulfill ourselves unless we live in accordance with what we are.

God did not only create us; he follows us throughout our whole life.

In the Old Testament, we read that man was different from other beings because God is concerned about him, takes care of him, visits him, shows him that he is interested in him.

Human beings fulfill themselves in this communion with God, by saying "yes" to God in every moment of their lives, responding to the "yes" that he said by creating them because he loved them, and following him throughout their lives because they love him.

We find our real selves through this relationship with God. Here is our happiness.

To do the will of God, therefore, is not — as it is often intended — to resign ourselves to something we cannot change. To do the will of God is to engraft ourselves onto the very path which leads to our fulfillment.

If we apply ourselves to doing the will of God, we will do what is most inherent to our nature, what pleases the best part of us, what most satisfies our deepest aspirations.

❄

Question: How do we know if a certain action, or decision is really the will of God for us?

Answer: There are many ways through which God shows us his will: first of all, through his words which we find in Scriptures; then, through what the Church, who is the Spouse of Christ, and a mother and teacher, tells us. God also speaks to us through the signs of the times, through our superiors, or the duties of our state of life. He shows us his will also through circumstances, encounters and events — whether they are joyful, indifferent, or painful.

But since the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts, it is God himself within us who speaks to us. In listening to him, we can come to discern what God wants and is asking of us personally in every moment, and then follow his invitation.

❄

Question: When we hear the expression, "to do the will of God," we usually think of an attitude of resignation, of the inevitable acceptance of an unavoidable destiny. How is it in the Movement?

Answer: In the Movement, we certainly understand that there are circumstances where to accept the will of God could have a touch of resignation. Also Jesus in the garden exclaimed, "My Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done" (Lk. 22:42).

In the Movement we know however that there is nothing more important and useful and suiting for human beings than doing what God wants from them.

They are convinced that if they apply themselves to doing their own will, they will find it to be selfish, narrow, inconclusive. On the other hand, they know that if they open themselves to the will of God, they cannot but face the great beauty of a wide-open horizon.

Chiara Lubich

To decide, in fact, for the will of God — which is unknown, in the sense that we know only that its origin, its source is love, the love of a Father — means to start living a divine adventure. It means living throughout our life the story of a child of God. It is a story which is always connected (and it could not be otherwise) with those of our brothers and sisters, because we are all children of the one Father.

The founder of "Opus Dei," J. Escriva, used to say that Christians can accept the will of God in different ways according to their understanding of what it represents to them. ". . . to be resigned to the will of God: to conform to the will of God: to want the will of God: to love the will of God."[1]

In the Movement, we "want" the will of God and we wish to see the fulfillment of what St. Francis de Sales described so well when he said, "The soul who loves God is so transformed into the divine will, that it merits rather to be called God's will, than to be called obedient and subject to his will."[2]

❄

Question: Is there a will of God that should be preferred?

Answer: Certainly. There is a will of God that we have to prefer because God wants it so.

Jesus, coming on earth, gave us a commandment, and he called it "his own" and "new." It is particularly his, and is therefore typically Christian. He calls it "new" because it is for the new era that he inaugurated.

He expressed it with these words, "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:2).

Jesus was coming from heaven where the bond among the persons of the Blessed Trinity is love. He wanted, therefore, for men to live a life patterned on the life of the Blessed Trinity, loving one another as he loved us.

It is from this mutual love that one recognizes the disciples of Christ. And it is through this mutual love that unity is accomplished among them, a unity bearing witness to God in the world. It is because of this commandment that all their actions have value.

To say "yes" to God by living mutual love is to say yes to the very heart, the core of what Christianity is. It means focusing on the very meaning of the Gospel.

The new era requires "this" love, the measure of which is the measure of Jesus' love for us. His measure is the Cross.

❄

Question: The Movement considers Mary to be the model of inspiration in doing the will of God. Why?

Answer: The Movement could not but look at Mary in our desire of doing the will of God.

Mary is, in fact after Jesus, the one who best and most perfectly was able to say "yes" to God.

And her sanctity, her greatness lie especially here.

In the world, not everyone can do everything, but if we all do our part, we will participate in the good of the whole The eyes can see, the ears can hear, the hands can serve things, but all the parts participate in the life of the body, finding in this their reason for being. God who sees each one of us and humanity as a whole, knows which service each one is supposed to give. For this reason, it is very important to pay the greatest attention to what God wants from us.

The Focolarini see in Mary the person, who being faithful to the particular task entrusted to her, participated in the life of all of humanity.

Mary did not found anything in the Church, but she gave life to its Founder, and she is considered the Mother of the Church.

She did not work at a particular project in order to spread the faith, but she gave to the world the Word made flesh, and is considered the Queen of the Apostles.

As far as we know, she did not work in a particular way for the poor, the alienated, the sick, etc., but she is called: "Health of the Sick," "Consolation of the Afflicted," "Refuge of Sinners," and "Help of all Christians." All those who know her go to her as to a mother.

Mary did not start a contemplative order, but she contemplated "Heaven" in her own womb, so we call her the "Gate of Heaven."

She said her "yes" to God and not to herself and, for this reason, she became the mother of God.

And since she said "yes" to God, knowing how to let go of even her own Son-God on the cross, she has been associated with Christ in his redemption.

Mary, like all the young Jewish girls of that time, was thinking in her heart about the one who was to become the mother of the Messiah, and she teaches us that if we engraft our life onto the plan of God, we end up fulfilling what we most dream of, and certainly more than that.

Following her example, doing as she did the will of God makes us participate in the deepest possible way in the history of mankind, and be protagonists in it.

❄

Question: Our world is anguished by many questions that seem unanswerable. The spirituality of the Movement is proposing to us to "live the will of God in the present moment." Couldn't this be a way to escape one's responsibilities leaving aside the problems afflicting humanity around us?

Answer: Quite the contrary. In fact the first will of God for everyone is to be concerned about mankind, that is, our neighbor, our neighbors all over the earth.

If we do our own will, we will tend to think of our own interests and problems. But if we do the will of God we will be completely open to others, and feel on our shoulders the responsibility for those who are near us and for the whole world.

Christ, who in the New Testament replaces the old Law, and is the Law for Christians, said that at the end of our life we will be examined only on how much love we have had for the others. This is the will of God, and the saints, who are different from other people because they did the will of God and not theirs, are human beings who found their fulfillment through love. Their works in favor of humanity confirm it. If all people were saints, that is, fulfilled Christians, the world would not need anything else to become one family with peace and joy, and bread for all.

We know
that there is nothing
more important,
useful and suiting
for human beings
than doing what
God wants from them.

❄

Question: What about the problem of suffering? How can we see as the "will of God," (who is Love), a misfortune, such as an earthquake, an incurable disease, the tragic death of a dear one, certain alienating situations existing in our society?

Answer: The life that we are living is not real life — it is a test for the life that will not end.

We have to go back to this truth in order to understand God's logic, which is not man's. For instance, people refuse suffering, and they try to escape from it as from something which should be either forgotten or suppressed.

But God chose it as the means of salvation.

He could have used many ways to lead us with him in heaven, and he preferred to choose suffering, the way of the cross, the cross, the abandonment.

In this way he has given meaning to the "non-meaning" of suffering.

He said that his disciples are those who know how to take up their cross, their suffering.

Therefore, the attitude of a Christian before suffering is one of accepting it, loving it. A Christian is called to embrace suffering, because when a Christian sees suffering, he does not see black, darkness, he sees something precious.

When Christians accept suffering, they nourish in their hearts that peace, that state of "non-violence" which is essential to be able to work at alleviating the suffering of others.

In fact, though suffering is so valuable for Christians, it does not always represent the will of God for them.

If it is true that it is written, "Blessed are those who suffer, for they shall be consoled" (Mt. 5:4), it is also true that it is especially love that God wants. And love can alleviate, if not eliminate the suffering of our neighbors and our society.

Also Jesus, coming on earth brought about not only the salvation of souls but also the health of many suffering bodies. He wants Christians to imitate him.

Therefore, at different times, the will of God for us will be to be sick or healthy, poor or not so poor, ignorant or educated . . . .

What matters in all circumstances is to do the will of God for us, accepting everything from his hands putting ourselves on the way toward the universal brotherhood he started. Earth will then become not merely the place where we prepare for heaven, but almost a foretaste of it, a place where peace and goodness, work and health are provided as much as possible for everyone. ●

---

1) Jose M. Escriva, **The Way**, *(Scepter Limited, Dublin, Ireland, 1953), p. 187.*
2) St. Francis de Sales, **Treatise on the Love of God**, *Book VIII, chapter 7.*

when life becomes a divine adventure

There are people — of all ages and from all walks of life — who have said their "yes" to God, in both joyful and sad circumstances. From the experiences lived according to this choice, they have derived extraordinary lessons for their lives.

AN EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE

My name is Luke and I am 13 years old. Last year I found out that my mother had to go to the hospital because she had a tumor. It was a terrible blow for me, because Mom had always been with us and I could not believe it was possible that she would be away for such a long time. Also, since there are seven of us in our family, I was wondering how we would manage without her. But right away we decided — my father, the other children and I — that we would live this suffering well, and accept it as a grace from God, trusting that he would help take care of our family.

The night before the operation, my father and I went to see my mother in the hospital. It was a beautiful evening, because my mother was really at peace, even though she was well aware of the risk involved in the operation she was about to undergo. "I am certain of God's love for me," she told us.

As soon as we left the hospital, we went to a church to pray and to tell Jesus that we, too, were ready to do his will.

The following days were very important for me, because I felt that God was close to me and the rapport with my brothers and sisters had become deeper.

We all helped with the various household chores. My task was to prepare lunch and supper. The first day, for instance, I thought I would serve raw carrots because after school I was in no mood to do more work. But I knew that my sister only ate carrots if they were cooked, and so, to please her, I spent half an hour at the kitchen stove.

"But the Lord's messenger called to him from heaven, 'Abraham, Abraham!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. 'Do not lay your hand on the boy,' said the messenger. 'Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son" (Gn. 23:11-12). The painting here is "The sacrifice of Isaac," by Andrea del Sarto.

Every morning, before going to school, I went to Mass and Communion. Jesus was the only one who could give me the strength I needed to keep going ahead.

One evening at dinner my father told us that he was going to take Mom to another city for a treatment. But when he called us from there, I realized that the real reason for the trip was that my mother had to have another operation.

Then, unexpectedly, my father too had to go to the hospital. There was something wrong with his heart and the doctors were quite worried.

So we children were left alone in the house, but we were certain that God would be even closer to us now. Even though it was hard at times, there was an atmosphere of peace among us which was noticed by all those who came to see us.

When my father had a second, even worse, heart attack, we all intensified our efforts to live God's will, taking advantage of every occasion to love and to pray.

Little by little my father recovered, and even Mom finally came back home. It was wonderful being reunited, all seven of us, after such a long time.

Now I can say that the difficult period of time that we went through helped me very much in finding a relationship with Jesus — a rapport which now is with me every instant, in everything I do.

All the things that happened in my family could be seen as a series of misfortunes, or even a punishment from God. But, for us, everything was an expression of his love. It was a grace that Jesus gave us, a grace that continues to bear fruit in our lives. □

A COUPLE AND A NEW BEGINNING

For some time, my daughter Michele's marriage had not been going well. She had been married for two years and had one child, but her husband Jack wanted to regain his freedom at all costs. Once, after having been away for a few days, I returned home to find that my son-in-law was in the hospital for tests. Michele went to visit him every evening after work, travelling 44 miles by bus. Each time, no matter how kind she tried to be, he would say terrible things to her. One evening, pushed beyond the limits of her strength and patience, she got upset and left, slamming the door behind her.

When Jack came home from the hospital, he threatened my daughter with a stick and made her leave their home. Earlier he had told her several times that the time would come when he would force her to go away.

Now he could say that his wife had left him and that it was all her fault.

They quickly obtained a legal separation and Michele, pushed by her husband, consented to begin divorce proceedings. Right away, Jack's relatives began spreading rumors in our neighborhood against us and my daughter in order to win people to their side. We all decided together that we would not try to defend ourselves. Most important, we would avoid criticizing Jack in front of other people. This decision was not always easy to maintain, but we did it together.

Then the real drama began for me. I kept thinking that a Christian marriage cannot, should not, end in divorce. Other friends of mine shared this painful burden with me and they helped me to offer it to God every day. But I understood that I had to do something concrete. I spoke with Michele and asked her what she thought about her whole situation in front of God. "To tell you the truth," she confided to me, "my conscience is bothering me." It was really hard for me to tell her that she should try to avoid a divorce, because I had the impression that I was putting her back into the hell that she'd just left. But I felt that I had to go to the very heart of the matter and confront her with the truth. We both cried. Then there was a long period of silence on her part which lasted about a month. I knew that she was spending many a sleepless night and her nerves seemed to be giving way.

The divorce was scheduled to be granted in October and at the end of September, my daughter stopped by. "Look," she told us, "I am not going ahead with the divorce."

My husband immediately unleashed his anger on me. "Divorce, after all, is accepted by all, priests get married, no one goes to confession any more! You two are out of your minds, completely out of your minds!" I summoned up every ounce of courage I had to tell him how I felt. "You know very well that everyone who thinks or says such things is not living in the truth." Surprisingly, his anger subsided. Then he said, addressing Michele, "I agree, it is your life, do what you want."

My daughter made an appointment with her lawyer. "I do not want a divorce," she told him, "Stop the proceedings." Amazed he asked her why. "It is a consequence of my belief in God," she said. The lawyer answered, "You are the first person in 2000 who decided not to get a divorce on the basis of such a motive. But do you realize that things will be to your disadvantage? Later on, who will think of you and your child? Besides this, you also have to risk having to assume serious burdens if your husband should have an accident in the future or if he were to be left disabled." "I am prepared to take all the risks," she answered, "but I will not change my mind."

(continued on page 12)

"Mary said: 'I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say' " (Lk. 1: 38). An icon, "The Annunciation," by Vstjug, from the Tretjakov Gallery of Moscow.

(continued from page 10)

When she came home, Michele told me, "If you only knew how happy and free I feel; even if Jack were to return, I feel able to forget everything and start anew."

The following week, Michele received a call from her husband. He wanted to talk to her. Had he heard the news from the lawyer? We were ready for anything. She went to meet him. Two hours later, Michele came back radiant, but also pretty shaken up. "Jack asked me if I wanted to come back to him. He debated the matter for quite some time because he was afraid I'd say no. He admitted that he's been wrong and asked me to forgive him. The most extraordinary thing was that he too had suspended divorce proceedings!"

Now Michele and Jack are together again and they have begun a new life. They realize that there will still be problems, but their experience will help them to go beyond these difficulties. □

A FACTORY WORKER

I live in a big city in Italy and I have been working for seven years in the production sector of a large factory. I was hired as a simple laborer even though I was a skilled worker. I really needed to work, because we were in pretty great financial need.

To my great surprise, my first day on the job, I was not assigned to work immediately but was given a book to study. The days went by and I was always there, book in hand. I was tired of reading and began to smoke a lot more. One time I ran out of matches so I asked one of my co-workers for a light. He stopped working and walked away. Later on, I approached another co-worker but he also walked off without answering me. At first, I did not understand, but then it became clear. They saw me as an intruder and, at least subconsciously, they wanted me out of there. If I were to learn the ropes right away, then the head of our department would have had someone to count on to do that particular job, and my co-workers did not know yet if I would participate in their own little game of habitual infractions, made up of long breaks, absences, coming and going at will, etc.

After four months, I finally got assigned to a job. No one thought of giving me suggestions or explanations; they simply continued to ignore me just as they had been doing all along.

All they ever said to me was: "Don't trust anyone. Keep your eyes open . . . the supervisor is loyal to the owner. When he enters the room, pretend you're working and as soon as he leaves, you can relax . . . " That's how things went on in the factory.

All these things served to create a very tense atmosphere and often violent arguments broke out. Because of this I would come home in pieces. I felt like a spring that was wound too tightly. My family suffered as a result. I would get upset with my wife and children over nothing. Besides everything else, I had my own financial problems and all those discussions on fair pay and healthy working conditions which came up from time to time at work really hit home.

In our department too there were things that were harmful: noisy machines, improper ventilation. Even so, when we had our union meetings and saw that we had the same requests, we were unable to resolve the conflicts among us. I asked myself over and over: "Can it be that to earn a living, you have to ruin your life in the process? There has to be a way to maintain your dignity as a human being, even on the job."

I asked some family friends these questions. After listening to me, they answered me in a most original manner. They suggested that I try to live the Gospel more intensely. This was a new and startling idea, a way I hadn't even thought of but, since I was desperate, I decided to give it a try. I had to seek to do the will of God moment by moment, loving those around me — my family, my co-workers who were so hostile and wary, every person I met throughout the day. It was like a breath of fresh air. Now going to work acquired meaning and I understood what God wanted me to do in that little section of society where I was: to create an atmosphere of cooperation and helpfulness, an atmosphere in which we would actually look forward to working together.

I began with small things, a cigarette, a "hello," a kind word, but more than anything else, when circumstances permitted it, I tried to emphasize the positive side of each person, to highlight those personal qualities which everyone possessed, notwithstanding their limits. It was like sewing up the holes in a social fabric that had been torn to shreds. Things progressed slowly and even today the work continues.

One of my co-workers was hard to get along with. Everyone made fun of him and besides everything else, he did very little work. I tried to get to know him and his family better. I worked side by side with him, trying to help him solve some of the problems he was having with his work. He responded to my concern right away. He told me about all his problems at work and with his family. We became friends. This is what I tried to do with everyone. The rapport among all of us grew stronger every day, so much so that sometimes we would get together spontaneously around my table.

Our supervisor was amazed because he'd never experienced such an atmosphere among us before.

I saw that my way of going about my work was beginning to change, too. I tried to do each step as perfectly as I could, attentively and with enthusiasm, out of consideration for the next worker on the assembly line. That potentially monotonous task, repeated over and over, became a creative act because it was filled with an attitude of love for each person; and this made me happy. So often you hear people at work say: "Nobody else does anything — why should I?" Instead, I saw that when you try to build an authentic rapport with everyone and they see someone working seriously and with care, the desire to do likewise arises spontaneously on their part, too. This was what was happening in my own department.

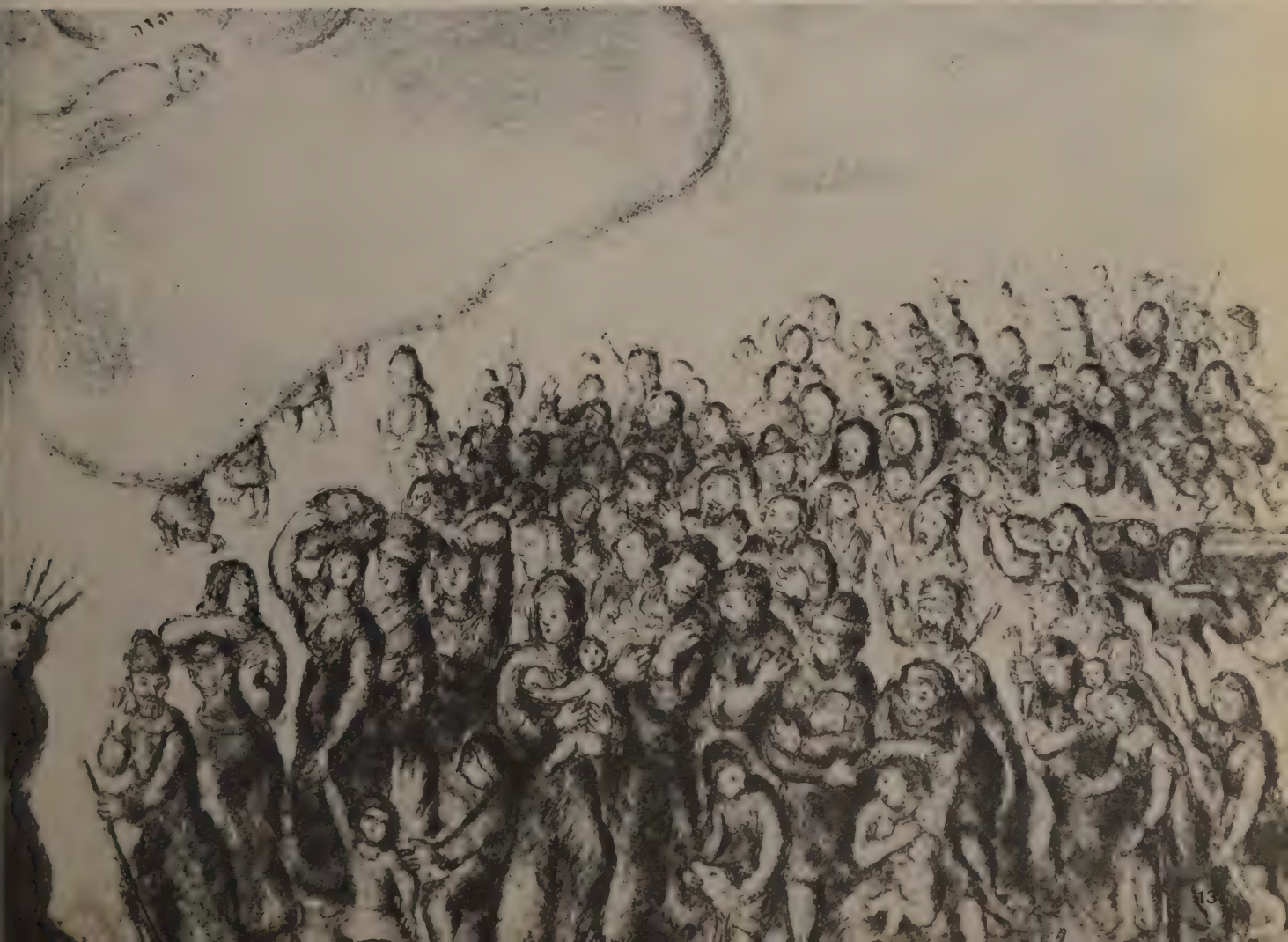
At one point, a few openings came up within the company for jobs more suited to my skills. It was the perfect opportunity for me. I also had the possibility of having one of the directors recommend me, since he and I had become friends, but I decided against it. I felt so strongly that to do the will of God in this situation meant to prepare myself well for the interview, and not merely depend on someone else's support. Everyone asked: "Who do you have to put in a good word for you?" They were amazed and incredulous when I told them, "No one." I ended up being one of those who got the job.

Some days later, one of the directors made an appointment to speak with me. A friend of mine advised: "Don't hesitate when you answer, show that you're sure of yourself, always answer 'yes' when they ask if you know how to do something . . . "

I thanked him, but also here I wanted to do the will of God which meant to be honest in speaking of my qualifications and not to use whoever interviewed me for my own personal ends. I found

(continued on page 14)

And God said to Moses: "Come now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10). The painting is "The Exodus out of Egypt," by Chagall.



"Father, if it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done" (Lk. 22:42). Here we see "The Prayer in the Garden" by Andrea Mantegna from the Museum of Tours.

(continued from page 13)

myself face to face with this director and after some simple questions, he asked me if I knew how to do certain tasks. I answered: "I don't have any actual experience in this area, though I do think that I could learn very quickly because of my studies and the work I have been doing till now." We shook hands heartily. Our meeting ended and the results were in my favor. □

If universal history is the fifth Gospel for humanity, the personal events making up one's life are the same thing for each individual. When we look at our lives through the eyes of God, it appears as a plan to bring us back to unity with God from dispersion. We understand then that detachment from loved ones, the loss of honor and prestigious positions in life are nothing but becoming free from human factors in order to go steadily alone toward the Only One, alone toward God. At this point, every day has the value of a divine adventure, if it has helped us to go along the ray of sun — your ray which is connected to the Sun of God. It is called marching toward death, while it is progress toward freedom — for at the end of this road the Father is awaiting you. It is therefore going toward life, the life that has no end.

Igino Giordani

(Excerpt taken from "Diary of Fire," Citta Nuova, 1980.)

ACCEPTING SUFFERING

Nine years ago, I was seriously ill with a malignant tumor of the lymph glands. The tumor was miraculously stopped from progressing because of immediate surgical intervention. From that time on, I had to undergo periodic check-ups.

This month too as usual, I had to go to be examined. A few days earlier, however, the radiologist had told me that he'd noticed something unusual on the recent X ray of my thorax. Naturally, I was very worried, but I kept my fears to myself so as not to alarm my children.

The doctor was unable to calm my fears; on the contrary, I noticed his startled look as he viewed my X ray. "Come back in 30 days." These were the few, unsettling words with which he left me. During my trip home, my mind was flooded with a thousand thoughts, the harsh memory of my illness, etc. But I wanted to push them aside and I began to converse with the woman seated next to me on the train.

This time it was going to be much harder to tell the children how the doctor's visit had gone. For nine years everything had been fine . . . I took a deep breath before ringing the doorbell, as I decided to continue to hide the truth from my children.

In the meantime, I kept repeating a new "yes" to the will of God. This was all I wanted: to do his will and therefore to embrace even this cross with joy.

I had a good thirty days to think about my situation. Sometimes I would cry all night. It wasn't so much for myself as for the suffering it would bring to my five children. They'd already undergone such trials in these last few years. They'd lost their father, their grandmother and an uncle of whom they were very fond.

I only told them that I would have to go back to the doctor's again soon for some tests, but I'm sure the older ones knew better. Then one morning, a doctor friend of ours inadvertently revealed my condition to my oldest son Phillip who came home in a state of shock. It was a very difficult moment. I succeeded in telling him that I had decided to accept the will of God with peace and that he should try to do the same. In the following days God gave me unexpected strength.

The moment came to return to the doctor's. They ran some more tests, took X rays and I underwent another medical examination. At the end, the doctor told me that the results were negative and asked me if I had gone through some treatments since he'd last seen me to bring about such wonderful results.

I felt as though a huge weight had been taken from me and I thanked God with my whole heart. But it seemed to me that in those days, more than anything else, I had understood how much more we have to trust in his love for us. What is important is to be ready to do his will, whatever it is, and to ask him for the strength to carry it out. ●

WORD OF LIFE

**"Everyone who drinks this water
will be thirsty again,
but whoever drinks the water
I give him
will never thirst.
Indeed, the water I give him
will become in him
a spring of water
welling up to everlasting life."
(Jn. 4:13-14)**

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to everlasting life" (Jn. 4:13-14).

John the Evangelist narrates an episode that is so rich in meaning that it is difficult to properly describe it, as is everything that relates to Jesus. Read it and you will realize that the person speaking is not of this world. He is a prophet and he knows the most intimate part of each one of us; he is the Messiah and he speaks of salvation, promising water that comes from heaven and is "the gift of God."

It was noon in Samaria and Jesus, having reached a city called Sychar, and tired from his journey, sat down near a well. He asked a woman who was coming to draw water, "Will you give me a drink?" Since Jews did not associate with Samaritans, she was surprised that a Jew would ask her such a question, and she told him so. Jesus replied, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (Jn. 4:10).

After the woman remarked to him that he had nothing with which to draw water and that he certainly was not greater than Jacob who had dug that well, Jesus uttered these words:

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to everlasting life."

It is clear that Jesus did not mean "water" in the literal sense of the word. He used this term to speak to the woman, and therefore to all who would come to know his words, of a more sublime reality that is both invisible and divine.

He used living water, that is, water flowing from a spring, as a symbol of the gift he had come to bring to all people and therefore to us as well.

Just as in the arid zones of Palestine or in desert areas, water is a precious element because it makes life blossom and satisfies thirst; in the same way the gift that Jesus gives us generates supernatural life within us and satisfies forever our deep thirst for a life lived to the fullest. Natural water could never give us lasting fulfillment, because only the water that Jesus gives, can bring us the fullness of life.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to everlasting life."

Since Jesus' gift satisfies us, we do not need to seek elsewhere, as in material things, for the meaning of our life, that is, for our happiness. We will find it in Jesus, but only if we are ready to stop searching for that life-giving water in things that pass away.

Jesus does not speak of a fixed quantity of water to be provided every day; this living water, in all who receive it, becomes a spring,

that is a dynamic force acting within us, giving us a new vitality that permeates our entire being.

This water, unlike natural water, will never stagnate; on the contrary, it will continue to well up in us, to everlasting life.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to everlasting life."

We might ask ourselves what water Jesus is speaking about.

Could he be speaking of the Holy Spirit whom we received at Baptism, and who gave us divine life?

Or is he speaking of his word, that should become an integral part of those who believe in him?

One does not exclude the other.

In fact, Jesus, in giving the water that imparts supernatural life, gives himself.

Jesus, present as new life in our soul, gives us "a way of being" that is totally new. He himself lives in us. And as we see in the saints, this life can be conveyed even through simple gestures, and can touch those with whom we come in contact.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to everlasting life."

How then can this word of life be put into practice?

If Jesus alone can satisfy our deepest thirst, the best thing we can do is choose him as the ideal of our life.

An ideal is chosen, studied, loved, followed and imitated. We identify ourselves with an ideal. Where can we find Jesus in order to choose him, study him, follow him?

Open the Gospel. His words are he himself. We can live them one by one.

If we do so, we will have no cause to fear for our future. We will not need to plan the stages of our growth to spiritual maturity, which is synonomous with our sanctification. The living water that Jesus gives us contains in itself the energy necessary to enable us to grow and reach sanctity. The only thing we must do is be faithful to him with all our heart.

CHIARA LUBICH

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences that some of our readers shared with us in living the Gospel.

TAKING A RISK

I was taking some courses at an area Vocational Institute. One day a friend and I asked for some extra help to better understand an experiment we were required to do. We came in on our own time, thus we were alone with the teacher. Upon completion of the session we began to talk about school and our goals in life, and also our guidelines for obtaining them. I was very pleased to hear this teacher express his faith in God and his Word which was for him the source of those guidelines. He then went on to quote a passage from the Old Testament in reference to how it might apply.

After we left the room my friend was anxious to ridicule this teacher by telling others in our next class what he had said, and making snide remarks as to how we might get on his good side if we were "religious" enough. She looked to me for support of her attitude but for the most part I remained silent. The word of life for that month was "Let your light shine. . . . " I realized how we might be called on to do this not only by our actions but also by a verbal account on occasion. Finally I just said that I thought it was great to have a teacher that was good and honest and had such faith in God, and that I respected him for that. Suddenly the laughter died down and after a moment's hesitation, they all agreed one by one, that what I had said was true. I had risked being ridiculed myself but the reward was deep in my heart and well worth it.

M.G.

PRODUCTION INCREASE

About two months ago, I began a new part-time job in a large commercial bank. There was a project that I had to complete so that other departments could have certain needed information.

This was the first time my department was doing this project and neither my boss nor I didn't realize the time it would take. We began on Monday and we had three days to complete it.

At the end of the first day I had just gotten everything set up and I realized the amount of time and work it would take. Three days would never be enough. I started to worry because I was afraid to lose my job. But then I remembered the word of life, "Many are the members, but one is the body." I realized that in order to be a living part of that body and to give my full contribution, the most important thing was to love. Right away this gave me a great peace knowing that I could do everything out of love. I was adding many columns of numbers which had to all balance. When they didn't, I tried to remain calm and do it over for Jesus.

During the second day, my boss was a little nervous about this project and kept coming in every hour to see how far I was. At first I became a little agitated at his

constant interruptions and would continue working on the adding machine as I talked to him, but then I realized that to live the word of life meant listening to him wholeheartedly. So I stopped everything I was doing and explained to him calmly and out of love at what point I was. He seemed more at ease and didn't return to check on me. That evening before leaving I went to tell him how far I had gotten. The project wouldn't be ready for the next day. He was concerned but he didn't get upset as I had expected. He pushed the deadline back so I would have just one more day. He was determined to have it done.

The next day at first I forgot about the word of life and I found myself in a panic, adding columns and columns of numbers. Then I remembered it and I stopped myself. The most important thing was to love. Shortly after I realized that things were starting to balance and the work was going faster. At a certain point my boss came to see if there was something he could help with. He took some of my papers and started helping to add the columns. I noticed that he too was making an effort to remain calm and not to become upset. In a few days the project was finished. The next day he called me into his office to tell me that the Vice President in our department had received the results of our project and was happy with them.

When I spoke later with the Financial Manager of the department, he commented that the work he saw coming out of our office was unbelievable; he found our production incredible for the time we had and for the detailed and accurate information we gave out.

B.R.

GOING OUT OF MYSELF

I work in an office with many other young people.

One day shortly after I began working there, I was in the kitchen and a group of about 8 or 9 girls came in for their coffee break. They started to joke with each other, but their jokes led to a conversation which was quite offensive. The more they said the worse it got. I finished my coffee silently and left. Day after day this incident repeated itself, and before long the other girls started to notice that I would leave, or that I wasn't laughing at their jokes. They started to tease me by directing very rude comments and jokes at me to try to embarass me. I wanted to respond to them with love, but I didn't know what to answer. I would just smile without saying anything and as soon as I finished my coffee I would leave.

When we began to live the word of life, "All will hate you because of me, yet not a hair of your head will be harmed" (Lk. 21:17-18), I thought of my friends at work. I tried to think of what I could do to put love there in that situation. It occurred to me that perhaps they spoke in this way because they didn't have anything else to talk about. From then on I tried to take my coffee when I knew they would be there. The next time we were together in the kitchen and they started one of their conversations, I took advantage of the first silence to ask the girl who was doing most of the talking to tell me about her weekend. We talked for a few minutes, but then she made a comment which brought the others back to their same old conversation. Each time there was a break between their "jokes" I tried to change the subject by asking them questions about themselves, etc. Every time I opened my mouth to say something I knew I was running the risk of being met by their offensive comments, but thinking of the word of life each time gave me the courage to overcome myself.

I also tried to greet them in a special way when I met them in the halls or elevators, no matter what they said to me. Slowly, they started to respond and a nice rapport was built among us.

Now when we go into the kitchen there is a different atmosphere — and they feel free to talk about themselves, their feelings, their families, etc. Often the others are also drawn into our conversations.

V.H.

JOB PROSPECT

I am an Air National Guard reservist and part of my obligation is to complete fifteen days of active duty per year. I just recently completed eight days at the Air National Guard base. Besides those of us who come for short periods of time, there are full-time technicians who work at the base. The work day is comprised of many activities and different jobs and sometimes there are long lulls of free time between tasks. During these slow periods, it is common practice to go to the cafeteria snack bar and pass time until we're needed for a job.

On my first day of active duty I went on one of these "long" breaks with several other people. And as I sat there I realized that I was wasting time that otherwise should be lived to the fullest, living every present moment for Jesus.

After that first and last time I decided that I would not do this again and instead live every present moment more intensely.

I had to choose to pass through this one "narrow door" as the word of life for that month suggested and continue to work at whatever I could find. It was quite difficult to choose to stay and work because I opened myself up for ridicule from the others as an oddball who preferred to work rather than take breaks. And I found joy in this little bit of suffering so I was at peace with myself. I continued in this way for the duration of my active duty time and I kept very busy.

But as a result of this, something happened which I never even considered. I am currently looking for a job and the Section Chief where I work had told me that since I lacked long-term experience and there were others with much more experience than I, it would take at least two years before I could hope to find work at the Air Guard. But I found out that my Section Chief was very impressed with the way I work and he told my supervisor that if a job position opens up, he'll hire me in a minute.

B.B.

PREACHING WITH A BRUSH

Fra Angelico and the 15th Century World

by RICHARD ROSSELLI

He had a well-sculpted face with solid, robust jaws, a wide forehead, and protruding cheekbones. Under his frock and mantle, one could see the suggestion of square muscular shoulders. The hands resting on his hips were the strong able hands of a worker, with palms which were most certainly covered with callouses, like the hands of a peasant farmer. This is the way Fra Angelico is known to us from a sculpture done in base relief on his tomb at the Church of "Santa Maria sopra Minerva."

This image is enough to refute any notion that Fra Angelico was a naive and timid little monk, a citizen of the 14th century lost in the 15th century — as someone once called him — or a simple artist who painted whatever he was told to paint, or even one who brought to his drawing board, in an artless fashion, the visions which his mystical soul dictated to him. Neither can we say that he was merely an artist hidden away in a cloister, closed off in his world of prayer and contemplation, unaware of what was going on outside the monastery. Certainly he was not troubled by the attractions of the outside world, but this was because the pomp of the 15th century world was only vanity for him. For this reason, he did not ignore the misery and sufferings of mankind, which in no way were distant from him, even in the rarefied atmosphere of the monastery.

Anyone who thinks of Fra Angelico merely as an expert painter of angels and of crucifixes, has only to see the painting, "St. Lawrence distributing alms to the Poor" to understand that he is much more than this. The painting is composed of the figure of a mother drawing her small son close to her side, and the figure of a blind man — all marvelous examples of a mature realism. It was precisely because he had chosen the religious life without any regrets, with strength and serenity and because he had a profound understanding of theology, that the simple peasant, Guido di Pietro (who later became Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, "Lord Painter") was able to feel and see the sufferings of Christ in those around him. He did not narrate "the Bible for the unlearned." He did not do as Giotto had done, recounting sacred history in an immediate and dramatic style for the benefit of the illiterate. But even though his paintings and frescoes are deep meditations, and not mere representations, still they speak to everyone, with a language which is only difficult to understand at first glance, inasmuch as it does not strike the most sensitive strings of one's heart in a superficial manner but rather induces one to reflect, to concentrate, and to meditate.

From apprentice painter to novice

In 1400 or 1401, Guido di Pietro arrived in Florence. He must have been very young, 12 or 13 years old, and Florence, where the marvelous Medici period was beginning, must have held a great fascination for him. He had come from Vicchio, one of the castle towns which the Florentine republic had built around its boundaries in order to keep at a distance the threats of the powerful lords whose domains were located in the surrounding hills. These castle towns were actually colonies of faithful citizens of the republic and were placed in such a way as to stand at the defense of the various freedoms enjoyed by the citizens of Florence.

Guido came to Florence, led by a particular passion, the passion for painting, and he immediately closed himself up in a workshop, preparing materials and mixing colors for the master. This master must have been a very competent teacher because when Guido was only 20 years old, he was already painting with a certain confidence. His master may have been Lorenzo Monaco or perhaps Gherardo Starnina, both of whom were fine masters but not outstanding painters. Giotto's followers had already disappeared at the beginning of the 15th century and, either the succeeding generation of artists was not yet born, or else it was made up of children, even younger than Guido.

At any rate it was the great "Giottesque" style of painting which presented itself before Guido's admiring eyes: dramatic representations of Christ's Passion, readily understandable and laden with meaning, where the 14th century artists had written in what

one might call a "pictorial" vernacular.

Did Guido's decision to become a monk mature rapidly as a result of having these paintings, each one so full of emotion, always before him? Certainly this 14th century way of speaking through images was particularly effective: in a dramatic way and in strong hues, it translated the Franciscan and Dominican preaching into colors and figures. The 14th century artists identified themselves so strongly with this "preaching done with a brush" that whenever they found themselves before a wall to be frescoed, each one of them was very certain of having undertaken a continual battle, at close quarters, with the devil. Therefore, even if there were many reasons for Guido's decision to become a monk, the sacred representations that ran along all the walls of the Florentine churches and monasteries certainly did their part in compelling him — after seven years of apprenticeship, when he could already open a studio of his own — to begin another apprenticeship, this time with God as his Master.

"Frate da Messa," artist and preacher

It was not until 1418 or 1419 that Guido was able to paint again. When Guido (who as a monk had taken the name Giovanni da Fiesole[1]) entered the small reformed monastery, the Church was going through very difficult times. Ever since 1378, the famous western schism had been raging. There was a pope in Rome, Gregory XII, and another in Avignon, Benedict XIII. As a result of this schism, the rules of the various religious orders had slackened somewhat. It was for this reason that Giovanni Dominici abandoned Florence where he had preached for such a long time in order to found the monastery in Fiesole. It was small, miserable and bare but the community which lived there was austere and faithful to the rules of its order, in contrast with the rich monasteries in the city where the rule had been somewhat neglected.

It was at this point that Guido chose to enter the monastery, not because he wanted to be a painter-monk, but rather a monk who, if God so willed, would also become a painter. He went to Cortona for a year for his novitiate, returned to the monastery in Fiesole for a few days and then had to leave right away. At the council in Pisa which was supposed to heal the schism, a third pope had been elected instead, Alexander V, and Fiesole was under his authority. Giovanni Dominici did not want his community to have to obey this anti-pope. Therefore all of the monks went to live in Foligno as exiles. In fact, they remained there until 1417, when the schism was finally repaired.

When Giovanni da Fiesole[2] returned to Florence, he became a "frate da messa" (that is, a monk fully invested with all of the priestly powers). He was 30 years old and had not touched a paint brush in ten years. He had studied however, not only the liberal arts of the "Trivium and Quadrivium" (grammar, logic, rhetoric, music, astronomy, geometry and arithmetic) but also the divine studies such as canon law, contemplative and theological philosophy, dogmatic theology, mysticism and polemics — all disciplines which call for strict diligence, but which are indispensable to a Dominican who wants to be a "frate da messa," that is, a priest. Giovanni had learned to argue with wisdom and subtlety, as the scholars of his day taught. He had also learned to preach in the manner of the great Dominican school, which was more cultured and erudite than was that of the Franciscans.

What can we say of Giovanni da Fiesole when he returned to the capital of Western culture, anxious to take up his brushes once again? He was a young theologian, who knew the Sacred Scriptures "inch by inch" and who felt perfectly at ease in the presence of the humanistic and paganistic scholars who had become the vogue in Florence. The brief period in which painting had reached a standstill, when the last few followers of Giotto had disappeared, was over. Paolo Uccello, who had a veritable obsession for the use of perspective, the great discovery of 15th century artists, had been painting successfully for 20 years. Masaccio, though very young, was also already well-known. And what about Giovanni da Fiesole? Did he also insert himself into this new and vigorous current of art or, as a monk, did he remain faithful to the style of sacred painting prevalent the century before?

Often in labeling him, for example, as a 14th century artist who arrived late, what we forget is that first of all, Fra Angelico — as Giovanni da Fiesole later became known — was a monk. Likewise in judging this painter-monk, we often forget that he was a very learned monk, in a certain sense even a master of theology, and certainly the only theologian who has ever written his meditations and treatises not with pen but with paint-brush, reaching outstanding heights of artistry.

He was a monk and therefore his first rule was that of obedience. He painted as an act of obedience. At that time, the masters of the art academies received their orders for a painting or fresco with even the most minute detail specified. The person having the painting done chose the subject he wanted, how many figures there should be, and sometimes even the colors to be used. And no master, not even Masaccio or Filippi Lippo, capricious as they were, could even dream of doing things his own way. In such a great artistic era, the artist himself was very humble. Giovanni da Fiesole received his commissions from his superiors or from the prior. It is easy to understand then that whenever Giovanni painted, he had the tranquil certainty of fulfilling, in obedience, his humble work as a monk.

At a certain point, however, Giovanni da Fiesole no longer painted works destined for the cells of his brother monks, as had

Italian Cultural Institute

Fifteenth century Florence was considered the capital of Western culture. When Guido di Pietro went there in 1400 or 1401 the marvelous Medici period was just beginning. The monastery of San Marco still boasts of the wonderful frescoes that Fra Angelico painted there.

been the case in the first few years. He had received commissions from the Church of Santa Maria Novella where the 14th century artists had left some of their greatest frescoes. It was here that Giovanni da Fiesole really began to demonstrate his talents. His paintings of Our Lady (the Blessed Mother was a fundamental theme of sacred art during the early 15th century) immediately won the attention of the public and of other masters as well. They were no longer the vague, abstract images of Giotto's style, a style which the 14th century artists employed in their desire to lend a spiritual quality to their works.

For Fra Angelico, the Blessed Mother with her Child was in the fullness of her being. Therefore, the figure was not frail and transparent, but rather full and strong, the idea being that Mary's perfect chastity was not to be equated with incorporeity. The angels surrounding Mary were not transparent youths. The drapery of their tunics revealed the solidness of their bodies, they were trusty guardians of innocence, cheeks puffed up as they blew into their trumpets. The gold employed by Fra Angelico with superlative skill, lent an atmosphere of serene but exaltant triumph. All this shows clearly that he had gone beyond even the greatest of the 14th century artists.

Pictorial meditations

The humanism of the 15th century returned "culture" once again to the exclusive domain of the well-educated, away from the public down to which it had filtered during the 14th century particularly with the use of the vernacular. During this period even Dante himself was considered a "barbarian" for having foresworn the Latin towards which the scholars were then inclined. In the 14th century, art had spoken an immediate and dramatic language. Sacred art had narrated sacred history in simple and accessible forms for the sake of the uneducated faithful. Now, at a time when secular art was returning to the palaces of the great families — predecessors of the feudal lords — and spoke to an audience of the refined and well-educated, Fra Angelico's work signalled a turning point in sacred art. After the Scholastic[3] period, sacred art could no longer limit itself to the historic-didactic cycles used to convey the literal meaning of the Scriptures to those who could not read. One also needed to see the spirit behind this literal meaning. Whoever would stop in front of a painting or a fresco, should not merely be struck by the drama represented there but should also be induced to meditate.

For this reason, Fra Angelico left to one side the pages of theology and of asceticism which he knew so well. He proposed to his fellow monks, similarly educated, and also to the faithful who through the preaching of the Dominicans were acquainted with St. Anselm and St. Thomas, the idea of presenting their meditations and treatises in pictorial form. With these, he showed the scriptural concordance between the Old and New Testaments — a well-known theme of the "Summa" of St. Thomas — as in the series of the Life of Jesus, ordered by the monks of the Most Holy Virgin of the Annunciation.

He also sought to show the relationship between grace and the Law as, for example, in the "Symbolic Wheel" which at first glance is an incomprehensible rebus dedicated to Ezekiel's vision and to St. Gregory's commentary on it. There is a wheel (The New Testament) inside another wheel (the Old Testament) and both rotate around the center which is God the Creator. In the outer wheel, the figures are seated. These are the prophets, whose preaching was concerned with the life of this world. The figures in the inner wheel, the Evangelists, are standing because their mission is a heavenly one. In the outer circle there is the word "Genesis;" in the inner, there are the words from the beginning of the Gospel of St. John: "in the beginning there was the Word."This painting strives to show how the world of nature is linked with that of Grace and how everything revolves around God.

But this is only one aspect of the new step which sacred art took, under Fra Angelico's influence. The artists of the 15th century abandoned the worn, sorrowful

figures so recently in style in order to return to the canons of classical beauty. Fra Angelico, on the other hand, was able to arrive at an exterior beauty by means of an interior grace which, together with Christian asceticism, made spirits seem athletes with bodies that were truly beautiful. In the "Descent from the Cross," and in the "Deposition," Christ is not suffering, he is not twisted by death. This is how the 14th century artists used to portray him in order to stir pity in the hearts of the unlearned faithful. Instead, he is extremely beautiful in the serene, composed tranquility of the God-man who easily overcomes suffering. Neither are the pious women, the angels and saints surrounding Christ grieving or desperate. Rather they are all serenely and luminously aware that the great drama of the Cross is not so much drama as jubilation because with his death, Christ has conquered Death.

This is a detail of the Child Jesus in "The Virgin with the Child and Saints," which is found today in the museum of San Marco in Florence. In this painting one can note the vigorous realism typical of the fifteenth century.

The frescoes of San Marco

In the year 1434, Florence was full of happy excitement. Pope Eugene IV, forced to flee from Rome, had sought refuge on the bank of the Arno River and had moved the seat of the papacy to the Church of Santa Maria Novella. This was an extraordinary event because it made Florence the capital of Christianity.

Another important person came to Florence during that year: Cosimo de' Medici, recalled from exile into which the republic had sent him. He was a very wealthy banker and he was now patiently building up the political fortune of his family, lavishing his money with a generosity that left the sobre, frugal merchants of the republic absolutely dumbfounded.

As soon as he arrived, Cosimo went to see the Pope in order to appear humble and penitent before the citizens whose sympathy he wished to acquire. The Pope required Cosimo, in expiation of his sins, to spend more than 10,000 florins (not all of which were acquired honestly) to build a monastery. This was the monastery of San Marco, constructed upon the remains of a building which had at one time been occupied by Sylvestrine monks. This building had been given to the community of Dominicans to which Fra Angelico belonged, in honor of their merits and because of the interest of Ginevra Cavalcanti, a penitent of the small reformed monastery of Fiesole.

Cosimo entrusted the construction of the new monastery to Michelozzo, his private architect, to whom he also entrusted the construction of his new palace. Besides housing Cosimo's personal court, the palace was also destined to become the center of advanced humanistic studies. Thus the two centers of religious and secular culture sprang up contemporaneously from the work of the same artist and with the money of the same patron.

Fra Angelico was not called upon only to fresco the walls of the new monastery. In collaboration with the Prior, Antonino, a great theologian and later a saint, and of course with Michelozzo, he was also to preside over the construction itself. It was because of a serious illness that his generally sweet, serene disposition, far less robust than Brunelleschi's[5] or Michelozzo's, became more stern and composed during the construction of the new monastery.

When the walls were ready to be painted, the decision that was made showed once again the modernity of Blessed Angelico's style. A 14th century artist would have filled the long walls of the corridors, the dining hall and the community room with dramatic cycles of sacred history, narrating in detail Jesus' life and the lives of the Saints. Fra Angelico, no doubt advised by the prior, distributed his frescoes according to a very particular strategy. Not only would he create the most elevated, heavenly paintings of which sacred art might boast. He would also place them in such a way that a monk — or even a well-educated visitor — would feel as though he had been taken by the hand and led by sweetness, almost without realizing it, from image to image, separated by large severe gray spaces. It would be like being led from one doctrinal lesson to another, or better yet from one meditation or rather one spiritual enlightenment to the next.

The Crucifix, summary of every hope, loomed before whoever entered. It was a plastically perfect Christ, not writhing in agony but radiating peace and serenity from

a face which had so recently been covered with tears. In the room where the monks confessed sins and did penance, a great scene of the Crucifixion stood out with its characters from Golgotha, an invitation to penance and a guaranty of forgiveness. Strategically placed along the corridors there was first of all a fresco of the Virgin receiving the announcement from the Angel, an invitation to perfect chastity, as perfect as the figure of Mary drawn there. Then after a long stretch of walls, purposely left empty so as not to disturb the meditation of whoever travelled those corridors, one found a large painting of Our Lady, a renewed call to fight against sin. Finally, unseen when one first enters, another Crucifix, more severe than the others, almost an absolute order to go ahead, directed towards whoever might want to turn his back on this mystical journey. It was like this everywhere, in the dining hall, in the cells, in the hospice, on the first floor as well as the second.

To Rome with Leone Alberti

Ten years went by. The new monastery of San Marco had been consecrated and the Pope had gone back to Rome but not before having asked Fra Angelico to become bishop of Florence, as legend has it. Fra Angelico refused, suggesting in his place Antonino, the Prior of the monastery, worthy indeed to be bishop of the capital of Art.

In 1447 Pope Eugene died, reenkindling the fears of a schism which however the new pope, Nicholas V, very quickly put to rest. Nicholas V was the humanist Pope. He wanted Rome to compete with Florence and he called Leon Battista Alberti to direct the reconstruction and artistic renewal of the city. Along with Alberti, he also of course called Fra Angelico to Rome.

Some time before, at the invitation of Pope Eugene IV, Fra Angelico had already frescoed the Chapel of the Sacrament in the Vatican Palace. All that remains of this work today is whatever mention we may find in Vasari's *Lives* of the painters, because one hundred years later, under Paul III, the chapel was torn down to make way for a staircase.

Of his second sojourn in Rome — where he arrived by foot, because his rule forbade him to go by horseback — we have instead the Studio of Nicholas V, the humanist pope. Fra Angelico's style of painting had given in a little bit more to the sumptuous style of the day, profane figures entered into some of his scenes, but his ascetic vigor was not in the least diminished. In fact, on the contrary it had become stronger as in the work "Sixtus II giving treasure to the Poor," or in "St. Lawrence" of which we spoke at the beginning. The spiritual beauty shone forth more than ever and at the same time, Fra Angelico seemed almost to have succeeded in realizing what all the great artists of the 15th century dreamed of: using color for a sculptural effect.

While he was completing these works, Rome was swarming with thousands of pilgrims, and scholars of every kind gathered at the Papal Court. It was 1450, the year of the Jubilee, the Holy Year.

The doors of paradise

The highpoint of the Humanistic period seemed however, to come to an end that year. At least, it seemed as though humanism had moved away from the monasteries and churches in order to withdraw to the palaces of the lords, to the secular culture and the monastic and religious culture, was dug up once again creating a gap that would be deepened still further by the Renaissance.

Three years after the Holy Year, the Turks conquered Constantinople and the peace which had been brought about by the Council of Florence between the Eastern Church and the Roman Church, was torn apart. Who did Pope Nicholas V call to his side in 1455 when he sensed that his death was close at hand? He called Fra Angelico. All his humanist friends had abandoned him, attracted by the more sumptuous, wealthier and infinitely more worldly courts of the Princes. The threatening approach of the Turks divided the clergy and they accused Nicholas V of a lack of foresight, reproving him for the optimism which had led him to believe, in 1450, that a newly re-united Christianity no longer had anything to fear.

Fra Angelico did not utter a word of reproof against the Pope. Once again he was on his way to Rome — this time on horseback, because he had been named Prior of the monastery of San Marco and the rule of his order permitted superiors to go by horseback. He never reached Rome however, because the doors of paradise which he had so marvelously depicted in his renowned painting of the "Final Judgment," opened up for this monk, theologian and painter. Six days later, the Holy Father followed him to the tomb. It was almost as if he had decided to meet Fra Angelico on the road leading to eternal rest, since he had not been able to see him again in this life. ●

1) In honor of Giovanni Dominici, founder of the monastery. 2) i.e. Guido. 3) Scholasticism: The dominant theological and philosophical school of the High Middle Ages, based on the authority of the Latin Fathers and of Aristotle and his commentators. 4) Florentine architect and engineer 1377-1446.

FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
Roslindale, MA 02131

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio, TX 78216

LOS ANGELES:
P.O. Box 71701
Los Angeles, Ca 90071

TORONTO:
P.O. Box 302 - Stn. T
Toronto, Ontario
Canada, M6B 4A3

FAMILY LIFE

ROSE: A few years ago my father came to live with us. He was 77 years old, and had been living with my sister ever since my mother had passed away. My father was a very strong-willed, aggressive person by nature and it was becoming more difficult for my sister to take care of him because she worked and that meant that he was home alone during the day. Although he was physically well, many times he would forget what he was doing, for instance, and leave the gas turned on, or other things which could be dangerous.

So we brought him to our home. I remember driving to my sister's to pick up my father. It was a very special moment in my life because I felt that I was going to meet Jesus in him. In that moment, I felt a joy in my heart, remembering also my childhood — the many joyful and painful moments that we had shared. Then, all of a sudden, a certain fear and anxiety came over me. How was this all going to work out? It was the moment to say yes to this apprehension and remember that also in difficulties I can meet Jesus. The peace and joy returned, and in saying yes, I realized this could become a beautiful experience also for our children.

After he had been with us only a short while, we saw how very ill he was. He had moments where things were quite normal and then moments where unexpectedly he would begin to talk about the past and want to return to a place he remembered from before he was married forty-five years ago. Often he forgot who we were.

At first this was bewildering to the children. They didn't know what was happening, so Howard and I felt that it would be love for them to sit down and explain what was happening to their grandfather. It was touching to see them become sensitive to his needs and do what they could for him.

We could see the atmosphere of the family gradually changing; he responded in a beautiful way. For instance, when he became forgetful he would make a special effort to try not to be a burden. Many times he realized what was happening. We could see that love was changing him.

HOWARD: As Rose pointed out he was strong-willed and outspoken and it was really a big adjustment for me and for our children. I'll just mention one incident. My father-in-law liked to go and check for the mail each day and he would wander into the bathroom or the bedrooms looking for the front door. One of our sons noticed that he was unable to find the front door by himself and took him by the hand and led him to the front door and the mail box. Later on I heard my father-in-law saying, "I really love that boy, Tom." As our kids were growing up I could see that it was making them more sensitive to older people and what they go through.

One other thing . . . After my father-in-law was with us for a while he began to help out in every way he could. We noticed that after meals he began to clean up in the kitchen and take the garbage out. That became one of his jobs. We had a garden and he took care of it. It was his way to respond to love.

ROSE: After a while his condition worsened, and many things happened. There were very difficult moments and at the same time it was very peaceful. It was a time of really trying to be in the present moment knowing that being in the will of God he would give us the strength to continue.

Many times it was difficult to know what to do. Again we had to say yes to the suffering, and keep going ahead. I felt I had to be ready to remain in this situation for the rest of my life, if necessary. With that came a great peace and strength and the ability to love Jesus in him in a new way.

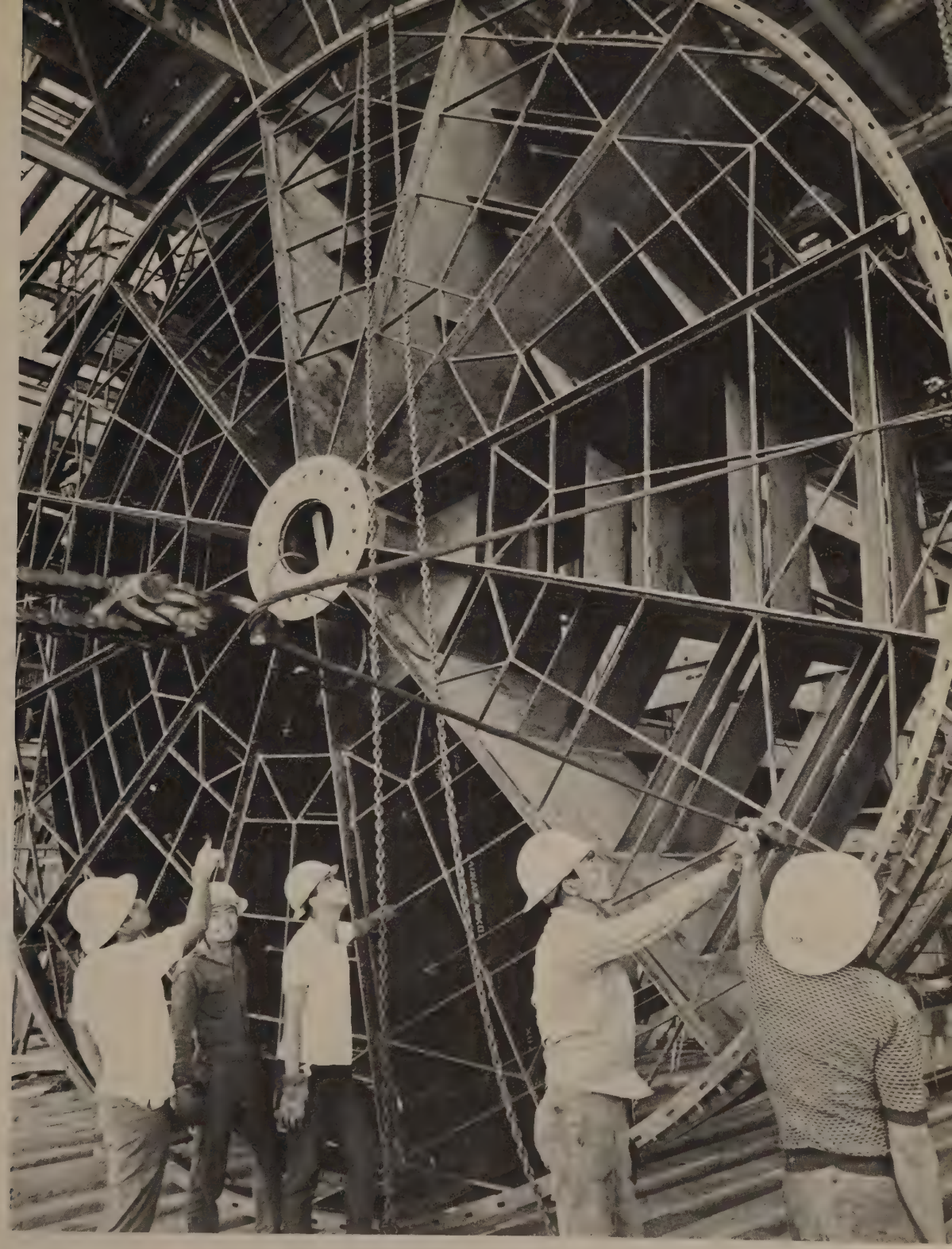
One night my father had a stroke at home. It was unexpected. The children found him, and Howard and I rushed him to the hospital. I went immediately to the admitting office and there I asked for a priest. I knew he had not seen a priest for a long time. It wasn't a Catholic hospital however and there was no chaplain in residence. It seemed to me at this point I had to find one for him or I wouldn't be able to say I had loved him completely. So even if it was late at night I called a parish ten minutes away. Shortly afterwards we were told that my father was already in a room and that we could go up to see him.

As we left the elevator and walked down the corridor looking for his room we saw a priest coming out. He said my father was conscious and he had received the sacrament of the sick. He added that he had heard his confession.

Soon after this he went into a deep coma and never came out of it. Within a few weeks he passed away.

The experience of the time he spent with us, and the peaceful manner in which he died, were really expressions of God's love for my father and for our family and we all felt a deep gratitude to him for the opportunity he had given us to discover once again this love. ●

Images FOR words



United Nations

"the duties of each moment
conceal beneath their
obscure appearances,
the truth of the divine will;
they are like
the sacraments of the present moment." *Raissa Maritain*

AN UNEXPECTED PROMOTION

by Marcella Ferrari

I was five years old and living in Milan when my father died. My mother and older sister remained there, but as my mother was very young it was decided that I would live with her parents and two brothers in another city. They had no children and so I, as the only child, was surrounded with affection and received every attention. They all felt a very deep sense of responsibility for my education and my future.

I enjoyed studying, especially math. And after I received a degree in math with a major in banking I planned to continue my studies. At 18 I was considered a very fulfilled person: I had everything: a loving family, success in my field. Yet I had qualms. All this was not enough. Beneath it all I was terribly dissatisfied. I was looking for something else.

Even though my grandparents and uncles were devoted to me I thought this emptiness was because of the separation from my mother. So I decided to discontinue my studies and return to Milan to be with my mother. I accepted a position with a large bank there and began a new chapter of my life: a new city, family, a job I liked. I still remember the feeling I had arriving in the Milan railroad station: I had the world in my hands!

The life style in Milan was the same as in every large city: early to work, a brief lunch break and then back to work again until late afternoon. Although very tiring, it gave the impression (which is partially true) of being very worthwhile. And I got caught up in its pace.

Consisting of budget sessions, research and contacts with other banks my job was anything but monotonous. I spent three fourths of my time there, often remaining after hours. Week-ends found me in the mountains skiing. My career was at a high point; the salary was ample, and in addition I received a monthly check from my grandparents.

Then at a gathering in Milan I met some Focolarine who told me the story of the origins of the Focolare Movement. They gave me the biography, "Three Focolarini," of three young men who had died. One of them had worked in a bank. I read this book with great interest and discovered a new outlook on work.

Work is not something merely added to a Christian life but rather an integral part of it. Work is the will of God. It has also been emphasized by St. Paul when he wrote: "He who does not work, does not eat." Work, well done, is a way of giving glory to God. We do not work for personal satisfaction or the esteem of others. We work to give witness that a Christian is called to the "front line" precisely because he is a follower of Christ — not of man.

In June of that year I was invited to a meeting in Rome. There people in the field of business would give their experiences relating how they try to live the gospel in their environment. Beginning on Sunday the meeting was to last three days. My request for two vacation days had been refused so I planned to go to Rome for one day. I would leave the same night so I could be at work Monday morning.

However, during that day I was very touched by the joy and peace I discovered in those people; and also in what they said. I was especially moved by their mutual charity. I did not know the scriptures too well, but one phrase came to mind; "where charity is, God abides." It was this presence of God among them that I experienced. When the time came for my departure I decided to stay. The following morning I called my office and explained my reasons. I thought everyone would understand how important these three days were for my life.

This was not so. When I returned to the office I was immediately called into the president's office and told to be ready for anything. Because of what had happened I would most likely be transferred to another office, or to another city. I went back to my desk. I remember the three telephones there. I watched them and everytime one rang I was certain it was the president calling with a decision on my transfer.

In spite of this I felt a deep peace. I had finally found the real meaning of my work. I worked as I had always done, but everything appeared new. Any moment could have been the last one there so I wanted to do each job well. I did not want my successor (who I had learned to recognize not only as a colleague, but Jesus) to have any difficulties.

That period lasted eight months. One detail in particular came to mind. Weekly statistical forms had to be put in order. This was a very boring job which I usually did in a hurry. As a result the forms often did not end up in the right place. But during those eight months I used extra special care filing — for Jesus in the colleague who would be replacing me at any moment. I was convinced of this.

Then one day one of those three phones did ring. A well-known voice asked me to come to the president's office immediately. Before entering, I stopped a moment to remind myself that the most important thing — even when meeting the president of the bank — was to love Jesus in that person, no matter what he had to say.

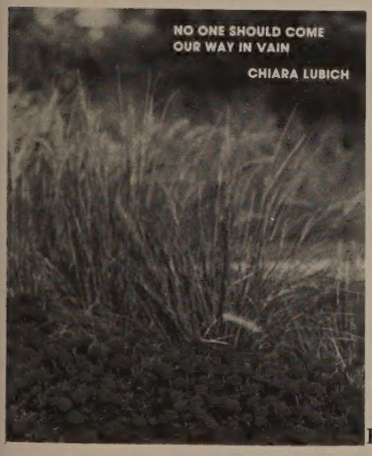
"Young lady," he began in his usual brusque manner, "I have to tell you that I am quite satisfied with your work in these past months. Everyone has noticed not only how much it has improved, but also that it has a new quality about it. Therefore, I am happy to tell you that you will receive a promotion and a raise."

I returned to my desk happy, but especially with my heart filled with a deep gratitude toward God; a God who never lets himself be outdone in generosity.

Focolare posters

A variety of posters, both color and black and white, are available at all the Focolare Centers. The latest two are in color (15"x18"). All of the posters can be ordered by mail from:
Focolare Movement, P.O. Box 496, New York, NY 10021.

FMPcl4



FMPcl3

Price: $2.00 per poster

If ordered by mail please add handling and shipping charges and specify if you wish to receive them first or third class.

Shipping and handling charges:

FIRST CLASS
Delivery time: approximately 1 week

1 poster 1.40, 2 posters 1.55, 3 posters 1.70, 4 posters 1.80. For more than 4 posters, postal rates depend on weight and zone.

THIRD CLASS
Delivery time: approximately 2 weeks

1 to 2 posters 1.00, 3 to 4 posters 1.15, 5 to 6 posters 1.30, 7 posters 1.40. For more than 7 posters, postal rates depend on weight and zone.

FOUR MARIAPOLISES

**WILL BE HELD IN NORTH AMERICA NEXT SUMMER!
YOU ARE INVITED!**

MARIAPOLIS '81

SOUTHWEST:
New Mexico Highlands University
Las Vegas, New Mexico
June 28th, after supper – July 4th, after breakfast

NORTHWEST:
Western Washington University
Bellingham, Washington
July 12th, after supper – July 18th, after breakfast

MIDWEST:
University of Wisconsin
Whitewater, Wisconsin
July 19th, after supper – July 25th, after breakfast

EAST COAST:
Alfred University
Alfred, New York
August 2nd, after supper – August 8th, after breakfast

For further information about all the Mariapolises, contact the nearest Focolare Centers. See addresses on page 23.

The young and the Gospel

One day, my three sisters and I were playing together and I decided I wanted a cookie and my sisters did too, so I went and got the cookie jar. When I took it to them there were only three cookies and four of us. So I decided to love Jesus in them I told them I didn't want any so they could have the cookies.

Bobby

Yesterday my dad said for me to clean my room because some people were going to sleep over. But instead I wanted to clean the living room because it wasn't as messy. But I knew it wasn't the will of God for me to disobey my dad. So I cleaned my room. After I finished the people called and said they couldn't make it. But I was still happy because I did it for Jesus.

Maryrose

One day in school we had gotten our autograph books for Christmas from the Mothers' Club. And all of the kids wanted theirs signed and I did too. But everyone was writing bad things in the others' books and I didn't know what to write. The girl next to me said to write something bad in the book and I really didn't think it was the will of God. So instead I wrote a piece of the month's word of life and the girl liked it very much, now I give it to her regularly.

Denise

One day my friend was home sick from school and she had asked me if I could bring all her homework to her house. At first I didn't want to so I said no and there was silence on the phone. During the silence I realized that I had said no to Jesus and I was not loving at that moment. I said yes to her and apologized. On the phone you could hear the joy in her voice when she felt my love. She was very happy when I brought the books to her.

Susanna

There is a girl in my class at school who is not very popular. Most of the girls like to make fun of her and to spread rumors about her. At first, I stayed away from her, but then I realized that if I rejected this girl, I would also be rejecting Jesus, so I I tried very hard to love her. Now we are good friends and I also found out that none of the rumors about her are true.

Julie

One day I was reading a very interesting book and my mom told me to go hang out the wash. I waited a couple of minutes to see if she would forget what she told me, but she told me again. I still wanted to keep reading but I knew that then I wouldn't be loving Jesus in her so I got up and did it. Right while I was in the middle of the wash she called out and told me to come in and do the dishes. I was getting pretty mad! But I decided that if I wanted to love her all the way I should go in and do the dishes too. So when I was done with the clothes I did the dishes and I was happy.

Lise

One day my mother wanted me to go to the store for her, but it was too far to ride my bike 3 miles there and 3 miles back. Then I sat down and thought about the word of life, and if Jesus asked, I would ride around the world for him. So I went to the store for my mother.

Vanessa

One day when I was walking home from school, I met a girl that wasn't very liked by the students and I didn't quite like her myself. She was waiting for her mother to pick her up from school. When I passed her, she asked if she could have something to eat. I didn't know what to say so I didn't answer her. I came home and saw a can of peanuts on the table. I remembered that I still had to love her even though I didn't like her. I gave her the peanuts and she was very happy. Also when I saw that she was cold I let her stay at my house until her mom came. I got the hundredfold because she was happy and we are friends.

Marimel

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

The Focolare Movement began in 1943, in Italy. Chiara Lubich, with a small group of girls, realized in the midst of the total destruction of World War II, that God is the only one worth living for. Hence they began to place the Gospel in the center of their lives. The testament of Jesus became their Ideal: "That all may be one . . . that the world may know that you have sent me, and that you have loved them as you have loved me . . . " (Jn.17: 23). The life lived by these first girls, the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to a form of spirituality proper to the Focolare Movement. It represents a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

The name "Focolarini" takes its origin from the Italian word "fire" and suggests the idea of "carriers of fire."

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. They work as other lay men and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini."

THE VOLUNTEERS

The Volunteers, who are also called the "Volunteers of God," would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. For this reason they remain in their jobs and in their professions in order to vivify them with this spirit.

Their aim is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

THE LARGEST MEMBERSHIP

The largest membership of the Movement is made up of men, women, and young people of all social conditions who are free of any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their free and willing acceptance of its spirit. They keep in touch with the Movement and with one another through large or small gatherings, publications, correspondence, and personal contact.

People with other commitments, even those bound to religious institutions, can form part of the Movement too because the Movement exists wherever its spirit is lived. People of non-Christian religions are also counted among the Movement's friends. Also those who owe no allegiance to any faith are often attracted by one or another of the Movement's aspects.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation.

Thousands of young people all over the world have been attracted by the spirituality of unity. Their number continues to grow.

At the core of this large group of youth, are Gen who have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love. The Gen use all possible means to share with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

Chiara Lubich

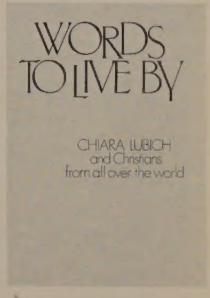
WHEN OUR LOVE IS CHARITY

At the beginning of 1980 John Paul II addressed the following words to some members of the Focolare Movement.

"Charity, love comes first of all from God and returns to him, 'God is Love,' says St. John. . . . and also, 'How can anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, love God, whom he has not seen?' (1Jn. 4:20).

"The Christian vocation, and particularly the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, demands that this truth concerning God and man be put into practice. I encourage you to go deeply into it and live it. . . ."

The Focolare Movement is — as its foundress Chiara Lubich states — a concrete experience of Charity. In this book she speaks about this experience.



WORDS TO LIVE BY

Chiara Lubich and Christians from all over the world.

Chiara Lubich is one of those people who have taken the Gospel seriously, discovered the life that is in it, and wished to share it with others. This is the reason why, for over thirty years, the members of the Focolare Movement have chosen a sentence of the Gospel each month and, day after day, have tried to put it into practice.

Now, millions of copies of the "Word of Life" and its commentary are distributed each month and it is lived throughout the whole world, for the Word of God is dynamic and communicative by its very nature. When it is lived, it changes people and transforms the universe.

This is what this book would like to show. It has been written during the course of a whole year. It is drawn straight from life.

paper $4.50

206 Skillman Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11211
Tel. (212) 387-3454

livingCity is something special livingCity is something special livingCity is something special
livingCity is something special livingCity is something special livingCity is something special
livingCity is something special livingCity is something special livingCity is something special